

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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Week of June 19, 1944

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"Slightly Scandalous"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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1944

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"Take a Bow"

A variety revue; staged by Wally Wanger; settings by Kaj Velden; choreography by Marjery Fielding. Presented by Lou Walters at the Broadhurst Theatre, June 15, 1944.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
June 16, 1944

Vaudeville Remains in Its Grave Even Tough 'Take a Bow' Bows

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A GOOD WAY to bring back vaudeville would be to put on some vaudeville. In recent times nobody has managed that simple trick. Last night there appeared at the Broadhurst a set of acts called "Take a Bow" which, for an overture and two numbers, looked good. Then it faw down and hardly ever got up afterward.

The overture was under the direction of Ray Kavanaugh, an old Earl Carroll man who knows his time-steps and pratfalls. The first number (not counting a lot of babes who danced and don't belong in vaudeville) was according to the book—a pair of acrobats. The Whitson brothers, and good, too.

Then appeared a really engaging man, Gene Sheldon, a burlesque pantomimist with a funny hat, funny pants and funny face. Mr. Sheldon would be hilarious any place, any time, and I wish they had let him have the stage most of the time from then on.

Lot of Money, Too

But from then on the new vaudeville—at \$5 a ticket, opening night prices—fell off like Eddie Cantor's old depression stock. Goldman Sachs, Cross and Dunn, an old-time team of tenors, held the stage much too long with very corny numbers. The pace which had been established by the band, the acrobats and Sheldon collapsed.

The pace could have been picked up by a fast, sure act, but instead J. C. Flippen, the master of ceremonies, chose to sing a song . . . when everybody had had enough for a while. Next came white-haired Pat Rooney, doing a bit of his old soft-shoe work and proving that he was no older than he looked by doing a slight jitterbug number with a chorus girl.

Chico Marx & Piano

The remainder of the bill included Chico Marx, who played the old poker game from "The Cocoanuts" with Gene Sheldon and discovered that Sheldon was funnier than he was, and who closed the bill with his amusing piano act. Included, too, were Raye and Naldi, splendid ballroom dance tricksters; Think-a-Drink Hoffman, who can now produce more liquor than most package stores; and the Murrah sisters, who sing like sisters.

Perhaps two-thirds of a vaudeville show are in "Take a Bow," but even some of these acts lack the speed and economy which made variety the national pastime once upon a time. Only Mr. Sheldon and the Whitson brothers had the sense to do their stuff fast and get off when they were through, to make way for the next act.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
June 16, 1944

'Take A Bow' Bows At the Broadhurst

By ROBERT GARLAND

"TAKE A BOW" is vaudeville. And vaudeville can scarcely be said to have staged a successful comeback last night at the Broadhurst. In spite of three different press-agents—Dorothy Ross for the entire show; George Florida as something special; Irving Zussman as personal news-

paper representative for Lou Walters, the producer—the potpourri in 4th Street is pretty tedious to sit through.

Revived and set up on a lighted stage, variety isn't what it used to be. Perhaps it never was! Seen through the pathos of distance, the Palace of the good-old-days is as glamorous as it is desirable. But, in the flat face of last night's "Take a Bow," was it ever that way, really? I doubt it!

Many an old-timer is still on-stage, doing the same routine in the same Palacean way. Father, not son, Pat Rooney, tap dancing as well as ever to "The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady." "Think-a-Drink" Hoffman, turning water into wine. Mary Raye and Naldi, with their graceful dancing. Chico Marx, one of the missing Marx Brothers. Jay C. Flippen, with his unruly hair—and humor—subdued.

Title Song, Indeed

These, bless their stalwart hearts, are back again. But vaudeville isn't! Not the nostalgic two-a-day which may never have actually existed. What you have at the Broadhurst is a memory-haunted floor-show, a gallant ghost of an entertainment pretending to pretend that the pre-Roosevelt Palace is not dead and buried, that the harpies from Hollywood are not now dancing on its grave.

And the addition of half-a-dozen show girls—reading from left to right, Gloria Riley, Dede Barrington, Kathryn Reed, Helen Simpson, Anita Artega, and Rae Hardin—help matters not at all. Would-be vaudeville, with a chorus added, still isn't vaudeville. When vaudeville was vaudeville, it didn't need one.

Nor did it need a title-song such as "Take a Bow," with a lyric by Benny Davis, and not much of a tune by Ted Murray. This title song is delivered at curtain rise by the Marjery Fielding Girls, in costumes designed by Ben Wallace and executed by Madame Berthe, against backgrounds designed by Kaj Velden and constructed by the same, in voices amplified by the Masque Sound Engineering Company.

Bye-Bye Vaudeville

After the title song is over and done with, Jay Flippen and Chico Marx take over. Mr. Flippen is in the limelight. Mr. Marx is in a box. Both are in a quandary as to exactly what to do. So, after a bit of badinage, the Whitson Brothers come on. They do acrobatics. Then, one after the other, Gene Sheldon, with Loretta Fischer, Johnny Mack with show girls, and Mr. Marx with reluctance.

At least, I think so. I know that Alan Cross and Henry Dunn follow. The boys are "song stylists". These are relieved by the one and only original Pat Rooney, marking, as he tells you, this first half century on the stage. Here, for the time being, old-time vaudeville lifts its lifeless head. Pat's perfection!

So is Think-a-Drink Hoffman, whose miraculous act I've never fathomed through the years. Last night, I didn't seem to care. Let's call it a miracle, then let it go. Mary Raye and Naldi still dance superbly. After their fashion, that is. The Murrah Sisters call their songs "inimitable". I'm glad they are. Chico Marx brings the show to an end. And all hopes of ever really reviving vaudeville, I fear.

NEW YORK SUN
June 16, 1944

'Take a Bow' Opens at the Broadhurst and Restores Vaudeville to Broadway

By HERRICK BROWN

VAUDEVILLE having been missing from the Broadway stage for some months now, Lou Walters remedied that situation last evening when he moved his

variety show, "Take a Bow," into the Broadhurst Theater.

In its tryout days Mr. Walters' production was known as Jay C. Flippen's "Slap Happy." Although his name has disappeared from the show's title, Mr. Flippen is still on hand to act as master of ceremonies, breezing smilingly in from the wings between the acts on the bill to toss a quip or two across the footlights and lend a cheerful air of informality to the proceedings. Outside of his duties in that capacity, however, he has very little to do in "Take a Bow."

Most of the laughter—and there was plenty of that echoing through the Broadhurst last evening—is generated by the antics of Chico Marx and Gene Sheldon, as amusing a pair of comedians as any vaudeville audience could ask for. Chico, wearing the familiar green hat and coat, makes his first appearance in one of the boxes where he is discovered striving vainly to win a smile from the man behind him, and, of course, before the final curtain he has seated himself in front of a piano and made those out front happy with another demonstration of that trick fingering of his. He and Mr. Sheldon team up here in a hilarious duet and they get together too in Chico's old card game skit with Mr. Sheldon filling in for Harpo.

Mr. Sheldon has plenty to do on his own. Whether wrestling with a banjo, burlesquing a classical dance, trying to stifle a sneeze, or listening to a lady make a speech about him, the silent Mr. Sheldon with his absurd suit and hat and his bland air of innocent surprise can be a very comical fellow, and is.

As all good vaudeville shows should, "Take a Bow" contains numbers to meet all tastes. For the lovers of song, Alan Cross and Henry Dunn harmonize tunelessly and amusingly enough to stop the show and the Murrah Sisters grimace and warble with what seemed to us more gusto than charm. "Take a Bow" abounds in dancing. In the ballroom style Mary Raye and Naldi glide gracefully across the stage and last night Miss Raye carried on neatly when a strap of her gown broke, leaving her in danger, as she said in a little speech afterward, of emulating Gypsy Rose Lee—and there is Johnny Mack, tapping with nimble toes, and a chorus of Marjery Fielding girls leaping high in the Hollywood Jump. Pat Rooney is on hand also to kick up his heels in celebration of his fifty years on the stage and to keep step too with a youthful rug cutter.

"Think a Drink" Hoffman, as mystifying as ever, was present to prove that the current liquor shortage can't halt him, and as every bill should have its gymnasts the Whitson Brothers oblige. Despite the fact that much of the material is familiar, the first-night audience applauded vigorously and kept calling for more.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
June 16, 1944

Vaudeville Bobs Up With Another Show

By BURTON RASCOE

CALLING Fred Finklehoffe! Calling Fred Finklehoffe! . . . They are at it again, Mr. Finklehoffe; they are at it again!

Every year along about this time some producer pops up to prove that vaudeville is dead by the simple device of producing a variety bill that wouldn't have been booked by the late Alexander Pantages in Ogden or Butte, and offering it as final proof that the cadaver is very deceased and never was very alive in the first place.

But for two years running now Mr. Finklehoffe, along in September, has proved it is all a base canard by offering top-notch vaude-

"Take a Bow"—continued

ville, with such stars as George Jessel, Frank Fay, Bert Wheeler, Jack Haley and Ethel Waters (all with new material) and showing that vaudeville can be as alive as it ever was in the palmiest days of the Palace if you know how to organize a variety bill.

Outstanding Acts

Lou Walters is the latest to impugn the good name of vaudeville, with *Take a Bow*, which opened at the Broadhurst last night. It has two or three acts (notably those of Ray and Naldi, Take-a-drink Hoffman, and a tap number by Johnny Mack) which are agreeable enough if you haven't seen them too often elsewhere. But the whole thing is thrown together haphazardly and without taste and is presided over by Jay C. Flippen, a master of ceremonies whose repertory consists of exactly three jokes, all three of them familiar to every jerk in the tank towns, all three of them corny and all three of them dirty.

Supporting Mr. Flippen in the cereal division are Gene Sheldon and Chico Marx. Mr. Sheldon's type of comedy is that of simulating the involuntary facial contortions and epileptic muscular movements of a drooling mental defective (including one gesture that is revolting and two that are sickening) and, unfortunately (unless you like that sort of thing), he appears off and on throughout the evening's proceedings. It is a shame, too, that he goes to such lengths to be unpleasant, for the man is a good banjo player.

Marx True to Form

Mr. Marx wears his familiar curdycors and organ-grinder's hat and his piece de resistance is—one guess! . . . Precisely that same stunt of playing the Barrel House Polka that you have seen him do what must be a thousand times in the last 30 years, in the movies and in the theater. I have always wondered why he ever did it twice, much less making a career of that sort of elementary piano trickery. As a stooge heckling Mr. Flippen from a box early in the proceedings Mr. Marx gets a laugh or two, and his old card game is still funny, brief and pointless though it is.

Pat Rooney has been on the stage all of 50 years and he is still one of the best of soft-shoe artists of all times. But they got Mr. Rooney on and off so fast that we hardly had time to realize he was there.

The Murrah Sisters I have liked very much in night clubs. Last night they seemed hurried and ill at ease and had little chance to show what they can do. Take-a-drink Hoffman's stunt of pouring an apparently endless variety of mixed drinks, hot and cold, and all bona fide, from two empty shakers and a pitcher of water is, of course, always amazing. And the dancers, Raye and Naldi, are always an esthetic treat. But there is no real variety in this variety bill and it is lifeless.

Page Fred Finklehoff!

NEW YORK POST

June 16, 1944

'Take a Bow', New Variety Show, Brings Back Familiar Old-Timers

By WILLELLA WALDORF

NO New York summer would be complete without a variety show and the new one called "Take a Bow," presented by Lou Walters last night at the Broadhurst Theatre, should fill the bill very pleasantly during the hot weather. In its cheerful, informal fashion it offers gayer entertainment than some of the more elaborate and expensive musicals Broadway has tried to take in recent months.

With Jay C. Flippen officiating as master of ceremonies in the chatty, easy going style of George Jessel, Frank Fay and Lou Holtz, the performance is supplied with comedy by

Gene Sheldon and Chico Marx, appearing together, separately and in conjunction with Mr. Flippen, who carries on the tradition of his m. c. role by singing a bit, telling a few old jokes at odd moments, acting as straight man when required and changing his suit every quarter of an hour or so.

Mr. Flippen manages to keep things moving at an easy pace and his faintly milled witless blend charmingly with the slightly musty odor of some of the comedy dispensed by the rest of the performers. It is not customary in these variety shows to shock the audience with anything violently novel, and truth to tell, the old stuff usually is funnier anyway.

One Marx Brother

Mr. Marx, appearing without any of his brothers, naturally relies upon that piano act as his chief contribution to the festivities, while Mr. Sheldon runs through his banjo stunt, sews his fingers together, takes out his eyes and puts them back the wrong way and succeeds in being his old demented self. Mr. Sheldon, in fact, is the busiest entertainer of the evening and the Marx-Sheldon combination is not a bad one when they get together as they occasionally do.

Other familiar figures are Mary Raye and Naldi, who perform their surprisingly acrobatic ballroom dancing in swirling fashion, and Think-a-Drink Hoffman, the amazing fellow who wheels in a portable bar and proceeds to pour all sorts of cocktails, cordials and even a chocolate soda out of apparently empty cocktail shakers and pitchers of water. No doubt there's a perfectly simple explanation for all this magic but it's a diverting act, always good as a snappy wind-up for the first half of the show.

Pat Rooney, who's been on the stage for fifty years and is still able to cut a caper with the best of them, is on for a brief nostalgic number with Marjory Fielding's chorus girls and even does a bit of rug cutting with one of them. The Whitson Brothers have a good acrobatic act and Johnny Mack is a likeable tapster. There are even six lofty showgirls to lend tone to the proceedings.

The evening's vocalizing was handled by the team of Cross and Dunn, of whom we had often heard but never seen before, and the three Murrah Sisters, who make extraordinary faces and murmur several songs. Oddly enough, both the gentlemen and the ladies indulged in long grand operatic takeoffs, the gentlemen telling all about how the 5 o'clock whistle wouldn't blow, to Verdi, while the ladies did some coloratura work on such lyrics as "Oh, my bathroom shower is leaking," quite convulsing themselves.

There's something for everybody at the Broadhurst.

NEW YORK TIMES

June 16, 1944

Not Much Variety

By LEWIS NICHOLS

VAUDEVILLE dropped in again last evening as it does every now and then to hold the franchise, and to deny recurrent rumors that it is dead. This time it is traveling under the title of "Take a Bow," with Lou Walters as the producer and the Broadhurst as the theatre. This time, as has happened so often in recent years, the bill is comprised of estimable people who do specialties they have done before but who collectively lack the sparkle necessary for a good show. "Take a Bow" probably belongs in the night clubs, for in the formal atmosphere of Times Square it grows a bit tedious. Variety should never stand accused of that.

What "Take a Bow" may lack is a full measure of knockabout comedy. No one ever has charged Chico Marx's assaults on the piano with being anything but funny, and Chico is up there doing his routine. Gene Sheldon is on hand, also, with his leers, man-

dolin and bawdy pants. But what they do is not new, and what is old is delivered amid spiritless surroundings which can beat even the best comedians into the ground. Cross and Dunn and the Murrah Sisters give comedy by song, but they seem a little too polite; they fulfill their obligations to Mr. Walters but they do not add the spirit "Take a Bow" could stand.

Of the others: There are Mary Raye and Naldi, the dancers who always are graceful; Pat Rooney, who shows that despite his fifty years on the stage, he still can be a youthful jitterbug; the Whitson Brothers, tumblers; Johnny Mack, the tap dancer, and Think-a-Drink Hoffman, the gentleman who can make you cocktails or milk from the same pitcher of water. Marjory Fielding's dancers do some unimaginative steps. At the end of the show last evening, Mr. Sheldon, in the wig of Harpo Marx, joined Chico in a bit of business. This served only to remind that there are some other brothers around; they should get together and put on a vaudeville show.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

June 16, 1944

Half a Bow at the Most

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN producing *Take a Bow*, Lou Walters had a bright idea, for lively vaudeville is just what the town could use in the dog days that stretch ahead. The pity is that he didn't come up with a brighter show. There are likeable performers and helpful acts in *Take a Bow*, as well as a general air of good humor. But its entertainment is too scattered and its final effect too negative. A spotty show can get by if there is a first-rate showman to give it high moments and hold it together, as George Jessel and Frank Fay proved in recent seasons. But neither Jay C. Flippen, as master of ceremonies, nor anybody else in *Take a Bow* can turn the trick. Mr. Flippen goes about his job modestly and unobtrusively, but he leaves things exactly where he finds them. Gene Sheldon and Chico Marx warm things up, but neither one can bring *Take a Bow* to the boil. There are plenty of times, furthermore, when all the burners, and the pilot light with them, aren't working at all.

Though Gene Sheldon strikes me as something less than a riot, his pantomime, at once rowdy and a touch macabre, is very much his own and very good at its best—as when he pretends to remove his eyes, clutches them in his hands, puts them back in again, and emerges cross-eyed. Chico Marx is not the greatest, or even the second greatest of the brothers, but he has a pleasant manner, the family gift of physiognomy, and a way of his own at the piano. These two gems are the personalities of the show; while Mary Raye and Naldi's graceful ballroom dancing, Think-a-Drink Hoffman's magic bartending, and the Whitson Brothers' acrobatics are its most serviceable turns. There are also some showgirls to dress it up.

Otherwise—which is about half the evening—*Take a Bow* either dwindles into routine nightclub stuff, or actually drops into limbo. Since it never drops from any great height, the fall may be painless, but the effect is pallid.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

June 16, 1944

Rates a Bow

By HOWARD BARNES

THE good old summertime has turned up a high-class vaudeville show. "Take a Bow" is familiar, fast-paced and funny. Those who have more than a nodding ac-

quaintance with theatrical antics will find little that is novel at the Broadhurst. What matters is the fact that they may re-discover the brilliant pantomime of Gene Sheldon, the pianistic nonsense of Chico Marx and the sweet line of a ballroom dancing lift when Raye and Naldi execute it.

Since Lou Walters has framed these principals in pleasantly unpretentious scenes and Wally Wanger has had a nice sense of timing in his direction "Take a Bow" is a welcome addition to the tail-end offerings of the season. As a matter of fact, it is far more entertaining than most of the recent productions, which have claimed dramatic continuity, high pur-

pose or an emotional wallop. In the old Palace, when variety meant something more than a floor show, it would have stood up very handsly.

The piano-playing Marx, for example, executes allegro pizzicato, with a side dish of macaroni, triumphantly. He plucks the keys as though he were Harpo at the harp. His asides are funny without being forced. When he and Sheldon are on stage together, there is a good big core of a musical show at the Broadhurst. The latter never fails to make the most of his rather random entrances. As a pantomimist he does not have to rely on Joe Miller's joke book, as do the others. For

my money he is a notable comedian.

You must certainly have seen Raye and Naldi in their seemingly effortless terpsichorean routines. They are at their best in this hodge-podge of vernal jollity. Jay C. Flippen, as master of ceremonies, is no ball of fire; to be sure, and "Think-a-Drink" Hoffman is reaching the point where he is overworking his one-man liquor store. The Murtah Sisters, Cross and Dunn and Pat Rooney are as good as ever, which means passable. There is a stander-upper act and several lovely show girls drift through the proceedings. As a vaudeville show "Take a Bow" is quite all right. In fact it is generally better than some of the fancy musical shows of recent months.

"For Keeps"

Play by F. Hugh Herbert; staged by Gilbert Miller; settings by Raymond Sovey. Presented by Mr. Miller at the Henry Miller Theatre, June 14, 1944.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
June 15, 1944

Mr. Herbert Drops the Ball

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Kiss and Tell*, F. Hugh Herbert studied adolescence on the sunny side of the street, with very engaging results. In *For Keeps* he has photographed it on the shady side, and the effect—even in a week when literate dialogue seems something of a miracle—is pretty painful. Mr. Herbert is concerned with a 15-year-old girl whose divorced, selfish and many-times married parents have cheated her of her childhood. They have largely ignored her existence while permitting her to copy theirs; she tosses off martinis, talks knowingly of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, palming herself off as 19, is all set for a fling at sex. Underneath, of course, she is a tremulous youngster with a craving for affection and Hershey bars.

Even in conception, as you can see, Mr. Herbert has taken the glibbest, gaudiest and most hackneyed view of his subject. But his execution makes matters considerably worse. Writing of brittle grownups, he can't refrain from intruding a facile brittleness of his own. Nor is he ever really serious enough to forego any opportunities to titillate the audience; young Nancy's knowingness often seems less a revelation of character than a device to capture the crowd. And naturally any one so little serious has no hesitation about ceasing, near the end, to be serious at all. *For Keeps* is another of those "problem plays" that stop having problems about ten minutes before curtain time; everything is made beautifully shipshape in a final burst of sweetness and light.

Worse yet, *For Keeps* is almost as tiresome as it is shoddy. Few of its scenes have any naturalness or life to them; much of its dialogue seems strained and forced; Nancy never becomes touching, and most of the other characters never become real.

The production, too, is rather uneven. Patricia Kirkland, who plays Nancy, is an attractive young lady who has the makings of a good actress; but she cannot quite bring off so contrived a part. As her selfish, cynical father Frank Conroy does as well as can be expected of somebody who seems miscast. Julie Warren is likeable but not very convincing as Nancy's sympathetic stepmother; and Donald Murphy does a pretty good job as a young man who falls in love with a Nancy he supposes is 19. But the acting is at the mercy of a superficial, artificial and meretricious play.

THE CAST

Miss Maxwell.....	Zolya Talma
Anna.....	Ellen Mahar
Paul Vanda.....	Frank Conroy
Mr. Reamer.....	Geoffrey Lamb
Pamela Vanda.....	Julie Warren
June.....	Norma Clerc
Jimmy McCarrey.....	Donald Murphy
Nancy Vanda.....	Patricia Kirkland
Charlie.....	Joseph R. Garry
Frank.....	Grover Burgess
Norma.....	Joan Wetmore
Terry.....	George Baxter

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
June 15, 1944

'For Keeps' Is a Too-Talky Comedy About a Girl, 15, and Her Parents

By JOHN CHAPMAN

F. HUGH HERBERT, who investigated the adolescent female with happy results in "*Kiss and Tell*," last night continued his junior-miss research with "*For Keeps*," which Gilbert Miller, presented at Henry Miller's Theatre. "*For Keeps*" is the most talkative play of the year, and it is dreary talk.

This time Mr. Herbert's main purpose is not to be funny, although his play is projected as a comedy; he wants to show what happens to a young girl whose parents are divorced, and who show no interest in her upbringing beyond providing her keep. Unfortunately, he has got so wrapped up in this girl that nothing happens. He just lets her talk and talk, and after a couple of acts you feel like telling her for land's sakes to button her lip.

A Full-Size Job

In the role of a 15-year-old, Patricia Kirkland, daughter of Nancy Carroll and Jack Kirkland, has an almost superhuman job and she handles it resourcefully and with poise. She is on the stage chattering almost all the time, and she has done better by Mr. Herbert than he has by her.

She arrives, does this girl, in the home of her father, who makes \$6,000 a day photographing soup in color for ads. Father, a man of sarcastic temper, is in the process of making his fourth young bride unhappy. The rest of the time is spent getting father, bride and daughter straightened out.

Almost a Monologue

At 15, the child is a woman of the world;

she smokes, drinks, cusses, reads "*Lady Chatterley's Lover*." Accustomed to being shunted from mother to father, hardened by hotel life, she's never had a chance to be a little girl. In "*For Keeps*" she finally gets this chance—and falls in love, too, with a handsome and decent 4F. But she has to tell ninety per cent. of the story herself. And not even Miss Kirkland's excellent stage presence and change of pace can keep the tale from wearing one down.

Gilbert Miller, who directed, has given the play a careful production. Frank Conroy is incisive and amusing as the father and Julie Warren is very pretty and nicely sympathetic as Wife No. 4. Donald Murphy is direct and amiable as the young man, and the lesser roles are well enough played.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
June 15, 1944

Actors in Search of a Play

By HOWARD BARNES

GILBERT MILLER has rounded up some attractive players for his newest production. He has neglected to provide them with a gay play. "*For Keeps*" is forever edging up to a bright comical conceit or a bit of caustic commentary, and then dropping the whole business like a hot potato. The knowing Frank Conroy does some proficient juggling of indifferent lines. An eager new ingenue, Patricia Kirkland, makes a rather radiant Broadway debut and Donald Murphy and Norma Clerc are more than adequate to their assignments. What is wanting is an entertaining show.

The surprising fact is that the new offering at Henry Miller's Theatre is the work of F. Hugh Herbert, to whom we are indebted for "*Kiss and Tell*." He has been asleep at the switch in his latest contemplation of adult nonsense and adolescent wisdom. The plot of "*For Keeps*" has numerous possibilities for farce, or more serious fun, as it explains the plight of a youngster who is shuffled around between various wives of her father. Don't ask me to swear on the Bible, but I couldn't find a hint of a genuine situation in the proceedings.

Only in the acting does the offering take on some of the quality which the author undoubtedly intended to put into the piece. Conroy is arrogant and aware as the multi-married papa of a lonely kid. It is very much like waiting for a touchdown which never occurs to see him hanging around the stage

"For Keeps"—continued

of Henry Miller's without even receiving a flat pass from Herbert. Julie Warren, in the role of his latest wife and Joan Wetmore, as the mother of the girl might have given him assistance, but they are never given the chance.

As for Miss Kirkland, she ignores the blatant frailties of the work to achieve a comparative tour-de-force. Reminding one of her mother, Nancy Carroll, she tackles the endless chit-chat of "For Keeps" as though she were involved in a substantial and amusing comedy. It may sound patronizing to call her promising, but she is all of that. Murphy handles the odd assignment of a potential auditor of the kid with artistry and taste. There is no end of engaging execution in this late season exhibit but it is expended on a dreary charade.

NEW YORK POST
June 15, 1944

"For Keeps" a Slight But Touching Study of Adolescence and Divorce

By WILELLA WALDOFF

F. HUGH HERBERT, whose comedy, "Kiss and Tell," is still running at the Biltmore Theatre as well as in several other American cities and at least one foreign country, is the author of "For Keeps," produced by Gilbert Miller in his usual smooth style last night at Henry Miller's Theatre.

Like "Kiss and Tell," the new Herbert work concerns a teen-age girl who pines to be sophisticated and goes around pretending to be older than she actually is. Unlike its predecessor, however, "For Keeps" is not an out-and-out laugh provoker, but a rather tenuous character study of divorced parents badly in need of a home and some reasonably normal family life.

Nancy Vanda, who is fifteen years old but does her best to look eighteen or nineteen, not only smokes and drinks hard liquor, but swears like a newspaper-woman (her mother is one) and confesses that she was bored stiff with the unexpurgated edition of "Lady Chatterley's Lover" and hasn't had the slightest desire to read anything pornographic since.

When mother hops off on an assignment to Havana, Nancy goes to visit her father, an irritable, sarcastic, absent-minded commercial photographer who gets \$1,000 for a single picture and occasionally turns out as many as six a day—beautiful kiddies ecstatically consuming a famous canned soup, model soldiers smoking that favorite cigarette.

Two Charming Performances

Although father impressed us as more of a grouch than anything else, he is apparently supposed to exercise a spell over the ladies, for he has just married a fourth wife much younger than himself, with whom Nancy hits it off beautifully. And having very little else to do, Nancy proceeds to fall in love with a decent young 4-F who is one of father's ace models and whom father treats like something the slave trade brought in.

There are several warmly touching scenes between young Patricia Kirkland, who plays Nancy with great charm, and Donald Murphy, as the young man who wears a uniform only in pictures, that make "For Keeps" worth going to see. Mr. Miller has been uncommonly adroit in casting the roles, and in directing these scenes.

Miss Kirkland who is the young daughter of Nancy Carroll, the actress, and Jack Kirkland, the playwright and producer, is making her Broadway debut. She is a very promising young actress who has had the good luck to make her local bow under the best possible auspices. Donald Murphy as the young man strikes the right note from the first and never falters in a finely developed performance.

The Rest Is Padding

The scenes between these two young people make up for a good deal of what Mr. Herbert probably thinks is very giddy stuff, but which actually consists largely of routine comedy fare of just plain drivel.

The role of father's fourth wife, who takes the trouble to mother Nancy a bit when she sorely needs it, is colorlessly written but sympathetically played by Julie Warren, while Frank Conroy struggles gamely with the part of Father, a thoroughly inconsistent character who reacts like a marionette whenever Mr. Herbert pulls the strings. We didn't believe in his sudden reformation just before the final curtain, but then we didn't believe that Mr. Conroy was ever a Hungarian Casanova either.

In a way, "For Keeps" is a sort of upper-class "Pick-Up Girl." Juvenile delinquents are not, after all, confined to the "underprivileged." "Pick-Up Girl" shows rather horribly what happens when a child of the slums is thrown upon her own resources without parental supervision. "For Keeps" indicates that there are also little girls with plenty of pocket-money in dire need of a mother to guide them.

Mr. Herbert, of course, doesn't get into the seamy side of this subject. He's just writing a little play to amuse theatre-goers and perhaps touch them a little without letting anything really shocking occur. But the idea is there.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
June 15, 1944

"For Keeps" Opens At the Henry Miller

By ROBERT GARLAND

IF night-before-last's on-stage misdemeanor at the National Theatre was called "Slightly Scandalous" (which it was), I see no good reason why last night's more-of-the-same at Henry Miller's Theatre should be called "Slightly Better." Especially when it isn't! To write out loud and call the concoction by its real name, "For Keeps" is dull, dubious and delinquent. And I don't care who wrote it, or produced it.

F. Hugh Herbert wrote it, he of "Kiss and Tell." Gilbert Miller produced it, he of taste and talent. Gilbert produced it all evening in his honorable father's honorable showshop with the honorable Frank Conroy in the leading role, the honorable Raymond Sovey as the designer of the scenery and his own honorable self as the director of the actors.

Why he produced it I can't begin to tell you. For it's merely one more would-be funny mixup in which members of the oncoming generation act like juvenile delinquents and members of the outgoing generation act like fatuous old fools. The latest case in 43rd St. is an unusually tasteless one, even more tasteless than the one now at the Plymouth in which J. C. Nugent is unpleasantly involved.

Naughty Nancy

Naughty Nancy Vanda—there's a Tin Pan Alley title for you—is the "heroine" of "For Keeps." Although only 15 years of age, she has ideas of her own. She wants what she wants when she wants it. What she wants when she wants it is a MAN. And the man she wants is Jimmy McCarrey, a personable 4-F'er, who poses in the basement for her artist-father. For one whole act at Henry Miller's the heroine pursues him.

Upstairs, downstairs, in the lady's chamber! Pretending to be older than she is, Naughty Nancy Vanda plies her prey-to-be with liquor from her father's bar, tickets to the local movie, kisses and conversation from her own luscious lips. (She also bites her finger nails.) For a while there, it's a whole lot like "Broken Hearts of Broadway" in reverse.

It's Naughty Nancy's christening cup that saves him. A big girl now, Naughty Nancy's christening cup is used in the living room as

a cigaret container. On the brink of worse-than-capture, our personable 4-F'er picks it up and reads the date of his pursuer's birth thereon. "Jail bait!" he as good as cries, dashing out on his boss's daughter in wolf's clothing. A narrow escape, Jimmy McCarrey!

Oh, Daddy!

Frank Conroy, a graduate of the Greenwich Village Theatre, an early Eugene O'Neill, the Mr. Brink of "On Borrowed Time," the husband of Tallulah Bankhead in "The Little Foxes," the Menelaus of Philip Moeller's "Helen's Husband," the inconstant husband of Ethel Barrymore's "The Constant Wife," a gifted cook, lobster-fisher in a thousand and a whipper-up of petpoint, is visibly ill at ease as Naughty Nancy's papa.

As naughty Nancy herself, Patricia Kirkland, daughter of Jack Kirkland, the playwright, and Nancy Carroll, the player, seems not yet ready for a leading role. Her affectations outnumber her acting talents. And during the course of "For Keeps" I do wonder how many times she's required to say "Daddy." You can forget about the play by sitting back and counting them as they come along.

Searching here, there and everywhere for pleasant things to write about Gilbert Miller's latest, if not greatest, production, I come across the setting by Raymond Sovey, the Hattie Carnegie gowns worn by Julie Warren, the ice skates supplied by Abercrombie & Fitch, and the shortness of the F. Hugh Herbert play, which, like its night-before-last predecessor at the Plymouth, is over and done with well before eleven . . .

"For Keeps" Gilbert—you can have it!

NEW YORK TIMES
June 15, 1944

Newcomer at Henry Miller's

By LEWIS NICHOLS

APPARENTLY F. Hugh Herbert is to be the spoke man for the youthful female of the species, somewhat as Booth Tarkington and "Seventeen" were for the male. A year or so ago he wrote "Kiss and Tell," and he is responsible for Corliss Archer on the radio. Last evening he continued his investigations into youth as the author of "For Keeps," which Gilbert Miller brought to Henry Miller's Theatre. Mr. Herbert this time is not in his Tarkington mood, nor the mood of "Kiss and Tell," and to drop the matter right down to Broadway essentials, he has not written a very good play. "For Keeps" had promised much, but it succeeds only in being disappointing.

Mr. Herbert obviously is troubled by the lives of children whose parents casually change husbands and wives, letting sons and daughters mainly to shift for themselves. His chief character is a 15-year-old girl brought up by her mother, who comes to visit her father, just married to a fourth wife. The girl smokes, drinks cocktails, knows a good deal about life and puts on such an act of worldly wisdom that an older young man falls in love with her. He vanishes when he learns she is not 19, but ultimately agrees to wait a few years for her; the father, who hadn't wanted her visit, decided he is the better of the two parents and will keep her.

Granting there is a play in the idea, Mr. Herbert has not done much about it. Everything is a little too pat and certain. The gruff exterior of the father covers a noble heart, and the young man will be just as noble when he has grown a little older. Before "For Keeps" has gone very far along its course there can be little doubt about how it will end. In "Kiss and Tell" Mr. Herbert wrote a good deal of fast dialogue, but the first half of his latest play suffers from a talkativeness that makes it crawl at snail's pace; and some of the last half, which could be touching, is unhappily sentimental.

Patricia Kirkland, the daughter of Jack Kirkland and Nancy Carroll, reaches Broadway for the first time in the role of the girl. She is one of the more attractive ingénues, pretty and with a good approach to her part; she will be an asset to Broadway. Frank Conroy is the father, playing that part with a booming voice and a roll of the eye, but not making an often-married commercial photographer too believable. Donald Murphy is the young man and Joan Wetmore and Julie Warren are wives one and three or four. Grover Burgess and Joseph R. Garry are a couple of furniture movers who enter in the last act for a scene which hasn't any particular bearing on the play. Mr. Miller directed; the setting, of a lush penthouse, is by Raymond Sovey.

In the second row last evening was Mr. Herbert's often-credited source of material, his two daughters. The fact he could turn out such a weak play about an unhappy home proves he lacks experience. No doubt he will settle for the weak play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
June 15, 1944

Patricia Kirkland Scores Triumph in *For Keeps*

By BURTON RASCOE

CARRYING the major burden of a honey of a play, Patricia Kirkland—the enchantingly beautiful and gifted daughter of Nancy Carroll, the actress, and of Jack Kirkland, the playwright-producer—scored a personal triumph of a kind that is very rare on Broadway at Henry Miller's Theatre last night. Gilbert Miller, the lucky fellow who produced and directed the play *Miss Kirkland* so conspicuously ornaments, should lay out the red carpet for her approach and departure from his playhouse hereafter; for Miss Kirkland's debut is an event for the books. She is an actress of unusual skill and a definite refreshing personality.

The occasion was the presentation of *For Keeps*, a flawlessly cast and flawlessly presented serious comedy by F. Hugh Herbert, the author of the fabulously successful farce-comedy, *Kiss and Tell*. My reflective reaction is that the whole of *For Keeps* is less than the sum of its parts and that if it were less adroitly mounted and played, it might seem rather weak and disappointed; but, anyway, it certainly adds up to a most pleasurable evening's entertainment, thanks to Miss Kirkland and the brilliant "support" with which Mr. Miller has surrounded her.

Author at Opening

F. Hugh Herbert, by the way, chucked a theatrical tradition out the window last night. It is against tradition for playwrights to be seen at the openings of their shows. Most of them leave town. Some hide below stage or in the men's lounge, anxiously cocking an ear for sounds of laughter or applause and suffering the initial stages of a breakdown. Some post themselves near a phone in remote

saloons and wait for reports of progress. But the intrepid Mr. Herbert sat in the exact center of the second row, flanked by his wife and his teen-age daughters from whom he draws the material for his magazine fiction, plays and radio serials. What's more, he mingled with the crowd between acts as brazenly as though he had never heard of the tradition. (He must have had a hunch.)

The role Miss Kirkland has, which keeps her on the stage and talking pretty much of the time, is that of a 15-year-old girl who has been deprived of a normal childhood by the divorce and remarriage of her parents. She was an unwanted child in the first place, her mother a selfish, self-indulgent, luxury-loving social flitterbug and her father a neurotic frustrated artist, who wanted to be a painter but became a highly successful commercial photographer. The child is shunted back and forth between parents, who are sometimes separated by continents, and received by each as a sort of unpleasant, conventional duty—unloved by either and disregarded by both.

The child's education, in both the formal and the social sense, is rudimentary; she has never gone to school but only to schools, a few months in this exclusive seminary and a few months in that one; her associates have all been adults in hotels, at resorts, and on ocean liners; and her speech and conduct therefore are built upon a pathetic desire to appear grown up. She has developed a thin but glittering carapace of ultra sophistication to hide her sensitive, affection-craving, little girl's soul.

Father No Help

Her plight is made all the more pitiful by her unstable father's succession of marriages and divorces and his irascible temperament which prevents his getting along well with anybody. He has just married a blond beauty of 26 (admirably played by Julie Warren) when it is his (Frank Conroy's) time to "have" the child "with him." Surprisingly enough, the young fourth wife understands the child from the first, defends her against her father, and, compensating from her own frustrated motherhood, sets the child upon the path of normal living again—and meanwhile, thereby, curbs the amatory ambivalence of her father.

It is all done with theatrical expertness, taste, wit and intelligence. There is a love story involving Miss Kirkland and Donald Murphy which has one scene that is extraordinarily fine.

THE NEW YORK SUN
June 15, 1944

'For Keeps,' F. Hugh Herbert's Newest Play, Has Premiere at Henry Miller's

By HERRICK BROWN

THE town's list of plays worth seeing received a bright and shiny new addition last evening as Gilbert Miller brought

F. Hugh Herbert's *"For Keeps"* into Henry Miller's Theater. What's more, the Broadway stage gained a welcome new recruit for its acting ranks in Patricia Kirkland, daughter of Jack Kirkland and Nancy Carroll.

Last evening was as much Miss Kirkland's as it was Mr. Herbert's and Mr. Miller's, and she lived up in every way to her theatrical heritage in her first New York appearance. Playing a long and difficult role, she brought both freshness and sureness to the part and she portrayed skillfully the transition of Nancy Vanda, Mr. Herbert's latest heroine, from a sophisticated girl, trying to act much older than her 15 years, into a youngster finding happiness in being her own age.

The author of *"Kiss and Tell"* has turned more serious this time. In *"For Keeps"* he's writing, and sympathetically so, about the children of divorce. Specifically, he's telling the story of young Nancy, whose father, a successful New York commercial photographer, has just gone to the altar with his fourth bride. Nancy's mother was No. 1 in the elder Vanda's chain, and she too has remarried, bestowing on the young girl a hard-drinking, bawdy-tongued stepfather with a touch of the wolf in him. As *"For Keeps"* opens, Nancy has been shipped on from Chicago by her mother to stay with her father while the pair out in Illinois dash off on a trip to Havana. Arriving much to her father's annoyance only a few days after he has returned from his honeymoon with a young woman, not so many years his daughter's senior, Nancy finds in the new bride the understanding friend she has long sought. The newest Mrs. Vanda quickly recognizes the terrible loneliness underneath the hard-boiled surface of the child who glibly quotes the latest cocktail party jests one minute and bites her nails the next. How these two team up to make one of Mr. Vanda's marriages stick for a change and end Nancy's frequent shuttling between New York and Chicago furnishes a thoroughly enjoyable evening in the theater.

Mr. Herbert introduces a pleasant aside plot, too, as a nice 4-F youngster, who works as a model for Mr. Vanda's camera shots by day and in a defense plant at night believes Nancy's yarn that she is 19 and finds himself in love with her.

"For Keeps" starts rather slowly, but it picks up both momentum and interest as it goes along, and once again Mr. Herbert displays his skill with good dialogue.

Frank Conroy demonstrates anew what a fine actor he is as he plays Nancy's blustering, and at the start thoroughly selfish, father in topnotch style, and Julie Warren looks like just the sort of girl who might have become Mrs. Vanda the Fourth and makes her understanding of her stepdaughter believable, too. Donald Murphy is excellent as the defense worker-model who longs to go overseas, and his scenes with Miss Kirkland are some of the best in the whole play.

Mr. Miller has displayed his usual high skill in the direction and Raymond Sovey in his setting has contributed a studio apartment that is just the sort Mr. Vanda would have chosen.

"For Keeps" is good professional theater all around.

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"Slightly Scandalous"

Comedy by Frederick Jackson, based on an idea by Roland Bottomley; staged by Mr. Jackson; settings by Harry Dworkin. Presented by Charles Leonard in association with Thomas McQuillan at the National Theatre, June 13, 1944.

NEW YORK TIMES
June 14, 1944

Stumble

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FREDERICK JACKSON is one of the world's most prolific playwrights, who once hired a summer theatre in Westchester and put on nine of his shows, one after another. His most recent offering bobbed up last night at the National under the name of "Slightly Scandalous," and it pretty obviously was one which came from the bottom of his trunk, perhaps even from the false bottom. Not to be unduly bitter about it, Mr. Jackson has turned out as tedious a comedy as the new season, and the end of the old one, have shown.

The story of this one is based on a woman writer and lecturer who has three children. They are the products of different alliances, all unblest by matrimony, with an Englishman, a Polish pianist and a French soldier who later became a general. Since two of the children are of marriageable age, everyone thinks it a good idea if the youngsters are reasonably legitimized. The children, after looking over their respective fathers, are unable to decide which shall marry their mother; everyone then thinks it a good idea if she continue with the fiction that her husband, and their father, had died.

To tell this strange story, Charles Leonard and Thomas McQuillan, the producers, have persuaded Janet Beecher to leave a comfortable Hollywood and return to the stage after an absence of a dozen years. Miss Beecher has not been well advised, for the part just isn't her type. Jean de Briac, Gene Gary and Boyd Davis play the three fathers with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and Anne Henderson, Nino Pipitone Jr. and William Berens do the same by the children. Mr. Jackson based his play on ideas supplied by Roland Bottomley, and he also directed—not making a very good job of that. The theatre still is waiting for a June show.

THE NEW YORK SUN
June 14, 1944

Janet Beecher Starred in Comedy, 'Slightly Scandalous,' at the National

By HERRICK BROWN

JANET BEECHER came back to Broadway last evening after a twelve-year absence in Hollywood. A dozen years being much too long a time for as talented an actress to stay away, her return in itself is a definite cause for rejoicing. It is easy to wish, however, that she had selected as her vehicle a better play than "Slightly Scandalous," which had its premiere at the National Theatre.

For this the star will have to take some of the blame, for from all accounts this little comedy of Frederick Jackson's is one of Miss Beecher's own choosing. It is based on an idea used in an earlier play by Roland Bottomley, in which Miss Beecher appeared in a tryout tour in 1932. Mr. Bottomley's play, called "Olivia Hews to Mrs. Grundy," never reached Manhattan, but Miss Beecher liked its theme, and it was she who induced Mr. Jackson to turn out the present play. It is possible that the plot of "Slightly Scandalous" contains

THE CAST

David Stuart.....	Nino Pipitone Jr.
Walter Stuart.....	William Berens
Jane.....	Dorothy Vaughan
Connie.....	Elizabeth Burt
James Willoughby.....	Paul McVey
Frances Stuart.....	Janet Beecher
Millicent Stuart.....	Anne Henderson
Edward Morrow Jr.....	Michael Meehan
Archie Campbell.....	Barry Macollum
Wareef of Farak.....	Ben Shaw
Gen. Georges Rigaud.....	Jean de Briac
Jan Letzaretzko.....	Gene Gary
Sir Michael Norman.....	Boyd Davis
Mrs. Henry J. Crewe.....	Frances Carson
Daphne Crewe.....	Brooke Shane

material for a good comedy or, at least, a good farce. Unfortunately Mr. Jackson has written neither.

The fable he spins is that Frances Stuart, his heroine, has three children, two of whom have turned twenty, and that none have the same father, a fact of which they are all unaware as "Slightly Scandalous" opens. Clearly allergic to marriage, she had lived in turn in her younger days with a young Englishman, heir to a title; a youthful Polish musician, destined for renown as a pianist, and a French army officer, headed for a generalship. She had fled from each, however, just as their child was on the way, and without disclosing to them that they had achieved paternity. After her third adventure in love minus wedlock she had hustled back to her native America, pausing long enough in England en route to invent a father to cover them all and purchase a portrait to represent him.

Her myth had held together beautifully while she was gaining a successful career as a novelist and lecturer on world affairs, but when the two older children, a boy and a girl, get themselves engaged to youngsters from families with a conservative background, and one of the future mothers-in-law starts probing into the Stuart ancestry, it begins to fall apart. How she reveals the truth to the youngsters and how she gets the three fathers together for a week and to let the children choose the one she shall finally marry and give them all a name, the war having conveniently landed all of the paternal trio in America simultaneously, is the theme of Mr. Jackson's play.

When the fathers appear on the scene in the second act things look up for a time, and in its central stretch "Slightly Scandalous" affords some neat comedy and some good laughs, but the whole idea has worn thin by the time the third act rolls around. Throughout, the playwright depends far too much on talk rather than action and the result is more of a chatty and often tedious seminar on marriage than a brisk comedy.

The acting is far better than the comedy deserves. Miss Beecher uses all her skill to make the lady meeting a dilemma into a glamorous figure, and Boyd Davis, Gene Gary and Jean de Briac share with her what honors the evening holds as the three fathers, all being capital and all giving a real lift to the play. Nino Pipitone Jr. is properly precocious as the youngest child, whom the author obviously considers a clever lad but whom we found a bore some brat, and Dorothy Vaughan brings some welcome and earthy humor to the role of a maid, ex-nurse to the children.

Harry Dworkin's setting of a Westchester living room is attractive and Adrian has designed some stunning gowns for Miss Beecher to wear.

Now that Miss Beecher has this play out of her system, we hope she'll stay with us a while and spend her charm and her talents on something more worthy of them.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
June 14, 1944

'Slightly Scandalous' More Than a Teentsy Weentsy Bit Unfunny

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A BRAVE MAN is the playwright who sits down and says, "Now I am going to write a comedy"—for comedy requires wit, and astonishingly few theatre writers have it. Frederick Jackson stuck his neck out by writing and directing a blooper called "Slightly Scandalous," which appeared last night at the National Theatre. Mr. Jackson is more brave than witty—lots more.

Put "Slightly Scandalous" down as one of those embarrassments which are always turning up on the stage, particularly in the warmer months; an embarrassment for the audience, because it wanted Janet Beecher and all the others involved to be in something good, and an embarrassment for the players because they must have known they were licked before they started.

Quite a Woman!

Miss Beecher's role is that of a woman who combines some of the attributes of Dorothy Thompson, Mrs. H. Luce and Mme. Olyvia Dionne. She is a writer and thinker of power, a person of charm and a fertile female. She has had three children, but has never bothered to marry their respective British, Polish and French fathers. Instead, she has invented a joint father for all three, and the memory of this gent suffices until the kids are pretty well along.

Then, when two of the three youngsters are about to get married, it becomes necessary that they have some sort of family tree. Miss Beecher invites the Briton, the Frenchman and the Pole out for a weekend so that she and her issue may choose her a husband. The rest of it goes on for two more acts and instead of marrying anybody Miss Beecher decides to run for Congress, and this is a happy solution for everybody because it brings the curtain down.

Plenty of Plot

Goodness knows, Mr. Jackson has enough "material" for a comedy, but I guess he can't write one. Out of all that stuff John van Druten could write several years' supply, for there is no plot whatever in his "Voice of the Turtle." Mr. Jackson forgets to make a single one of his characters interesting, and one or two, including a precocious boy, are poison.

Miss Beecher, returning to Broadway after twelve years in Hollywood, departs herself with gallant charm. Of the others involved, Jean de Briac and Gene Gary work to some effect as the French and Polish ex-lovers.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
June 14, 1944

—And Slightly Dull

By HOWARD BARNES

EVEN as an offering of the so-called silly season, "Slightly Scandalous" is a feeble theatrical jape. The new play at the National considers illegitimacy from several angles, but it fails to generate so much as a leering laugh. It seems that a Roland Bottomley had an idea, Frederick Jackson has taken it and embroidered it into an alleged

farce. Somewhere in the process, the original notion itself appears to have been lost. For the piece has neither wit nor point. It bumbles through three ponderous scenes without giving players or spectators a Chinaman's chance.

It should be good news that the comedy brings Janet Beecher back to the stage after a term of film acting. She is a resolute actress, and she copes bravely with the inanities of "Slightly Scandalous." She is asked to do some fine and fancy coping. As the unwed mother of three youngsters, who decides to introduce them to their respective fathers, she goes through the motions of a portrayal without ever being able to give it dramatic definition. It is pleasant to see Miss Beecher behind footlights again. It is no bargain to see her in this production.

For the author, no matter what idea he was adapting, has quite failed to contrive an entertaining show. There are moments when the bar sinister crowd is meeting daddies for the first time when one might expect a rowdy chuckle or two from the script. They are invariably mirthless. The preamble to what might be termed a situation is deadly and the resolution of the plot is downright baffling. Undoubtedly Jackson just got tired of whatever idea he was working with and decided to drop a final curtain.

Miss Beecher, as a rather broadminded lady, does what she can to give a fillip to the lagging lines. Jean de Briac, Gene Gary and Boyd Davis struggle with the roles of the fathers of children they have never known. The others in the company merely stand around hopefully waiting for something to happen. It never does in "Slightly Scandalous." Bastardy deserves better treatment, at the hands of the theater.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

June 14, 1944

Slightly Scandalous Is More Than Slightly Dull

By BURTON RASCOE

SLIGHTLY SCANDALOUS, which opened at the National last night, runs to less than an hour and a half of actual playing time, but it talked itself to death in much less time than that.

The author, Frederick Jackson, who also staged the play, apparently was under the delusion that he had written a neo-Shavian argument for marriage a la Russe (USSR) and a criticism of the institution as practiced in bourgeois capitalistic countries, for he aimed at an effect of realism by understressing the voices and action.

But the play, as written, is a farce. If anything, and, since it is not presented as a farce, it is not anything. The tone and tempo are so funeral that, after the first act, a sidewalk commentator was overheard to say, "They are playing it for footage."

"Slightly Scandalous" comes to Broadway from the West Coast, where they seem to be having a run on the word "slightly" for title use. Last year they sent us a slight sample of West Coast dramaturgy, entitled "Slightly Married," which had found some favor out there but was more than slightly gayed by the time it reached here; it was quickly buried with slight ceremony.

"Slightly Scandalous" is by no means the revolting mess that "Slightly Married" was. But it is something which might have been written in 1912 (and probably was) by an ardent but unskilled disciple of G. Bernard Shaw, with an earnest, sophomoric notion of shocking the ears off the Puritans and Victorians.

Without Wedlock

Janet Beecher, whose grace, charm and poise we could have welcomed back to Broadway (after 12 years' absence in Hollywood)

in a more substantial vehicle, is starred as a famous literary woman, who writes enormously successful romances for her money and highbrow articles as her contribution to the progressive thought of the world—articles to which Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek and Washington big shots give respectful ear.

It is Frances Stuart's (Miss Beecher's) conviction (and long has been) that marriage, as our laws and customs regard it, is an outworn and crippling institution, a vestigial survival of ancient views of property rights. It should be dissolvable, as it now is in Russia, she thinks, at the wish of either party. Holding this view back when Lenin and Trotsky were the dual power in Russia, and knowing that such notions were not yet acceptable in England, France and America, she bore illegitimate children to an Englishman, a Frenchman and a Pole, in succession, enjoying with each man a few months of happiness and then giving them (each in his turn) the air, without ever acquainting them with their fatherhood, lest their sentimental bourgeois notions tempt them to "do the right thing by her" and thus complicate her own existence.

Humor Lost in Tedium

She invents a father for the children (the same one for all three) and even has an oil portrait of him, picked up in an antique shop, and rears them in this myth until two of them are grown and about to be married into stuffy families who are of the sort who would want to know all about "Mr. Stuart." Mrs. Stuart confesses her past to her children, who have been brought up to be very "broadminded," and proposes to bring the three fathers of the trio together under her roof so that the children may choose one of them for her to marry in order to satisfy the legal and social conventions.

This is all very silly, of course; but had it been fast paced and enlivened with some comical characterizations the thing might have been rather entertaining. As it is, it is merely tedious. Miss Beecher shared the acting honors with Dorothy Vaughan, who had an amusing moment or two, as the housekeeper; Gene Gary, as the Polish pianist; and Paul McVey, as the business manager, Nino Pipitone, Jr., as the brat, was more irritating. I think, than the script called for.

NEW YORK POST

June 14, 1944

'Slightly Scandalous' a Mild Opiate From Sunny California

By WILELLA WALDORF

IN case "Slightly Scandalous" sounds like a deliciously spicy concoction with a kick in it, be advised that the new comedy at the National is more in the nature of a sedative. Anyone suffering from insomnia is almost certain to be cured after three acts of it. Most of us began to feel drowsy even before Janet Beecher got around to telling her three children—two boys and a girl—that the romantic leading gentleman in the portrait over the mantelpiece wasn't their father after all.

Miss Beecher came back to Broadway all the way from California, with this play, and the only way we can explain it is to assume that she suddenly felt an overpowering desire to experience that dear old New York humidity again after twelve years away.

"Slightly Scandalous," the theatrical historians tell us, was originally a play by Roland Bottomley which Miss Beecher once tried out many years ago. The idea so powerfully appealed to Frederick Jackson that he borrowed it, with due program credit, and wrote a new play around it. We never saw the Bottomley creation but it could hardly have been tackier than the disreputable little farce Mr. Jackson has turned out.

Out of An Antique Shop

The writing alone would have proved a decided handicap in the Broadway sweepstakes, but Mr. Jackson has made perfectly certain that all will be lost by directing the proceedings in person. He not only has a terrible time moving his actors around the stage, but his ideas of pace are funeral. We have seldom seen a more clumsily staged production, and it cannot be said Miss Beecher or her supporting cast did very much to lend professional authority to the performance.

Miss Beecher plays a famous novelist, world traveler and lecturer who begins most of her sentences: "When I was in Moscow with Stalin," or "General Chiang Kai-shek said to me . . ." It is assumed that she is a widow since she has three children and the only visible father is the portrait of Captain John Stuart over the mantelpiece.

It develops there never was such a person. The lady bought him in a London antique shop for four pounds ten, because she thought it looked better for the kiddies to have a daddy. Actually, the father of one wealthy stiff-necked British financier, while the other two offspring arrived after love affairs with a Polish pianist and a French general.

Marrying a Father

Having advanced ideas on the subject of marriage, and having gone to all the trouble to invent Captain Stuart and foist him off on the children all these years, the celebrated novelist and world traveler suddenly decides to descend into respectability by marrying one of the three fathers. Why? Because two of her children have grown up and decided to marry into the Westchester elite, who are fussy about such things.

The financier, the pianist and the general, all of whom miraculously turn out to be not only within hailing distance, but unmarried, come on for the weekend and from then on the fun is supposed to mount steadily. It is amazing how dreary Mr. Jackson makes it all sound, and it is astonishing how awkward most of the actors manage to appear.

Miss Beecher herself seemed nervous and a little dazed by the ineptitudes of the play. Paul McVey and Boyd Davis lent what support they could, while the others fuffed about under the erratic guidance of the author, who probably directed with a fly swatter.

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'Slightly Scandalous' Opens at National

By ROBERT GARLAND

FEW things fall flatter than a shady story dragged out too long. "Slightly Scandalous," the new one at the National, is a shady story dragged out too long. Roland Bottomley thought up the jest originally. Frederick Jackson elaborated upon it for the stage. Last night, Charles Leonard, in association with Thomas McQuillan, fetched it into 41st Street where, of late, the going hasn't been so good.

The going still isn't so good in 41st Street. Why should it be? "Slightly Scandalous" has already been exposed at least three times. Once as "Are Fathers Necessary?" Again as "Love and Learn." Still again—a dozen long years ago with Mr. Bottomley, the jokemaster, as sole author—as "Olivis Bows to Mrs. Grundy." Each time audiences have voted "No!" This time, I fear it's "No, indeedly!"

Janet Beecher, who just won't take "No" for an answer, returned last night to Broadway with it. Now, maybe she'll listen to "No, indeedly." For it was she who, back in 1932, when Franklin Roosevelt wasn't President, unveiled the theatrical shortcomings of "Slightly Scandalous" to Washington, Wilmington and Great Neck.

Father, Dear Father

This is another one about babies. Only these